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# Economic and Social Council

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**Commission on the Status of Women**
**Fifty-sixth session**
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"**

## Statement submitted by Sudanese Women General Union, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

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## Statement

The Sudanese Women General Union is a voluntary non-governmental organization that was established in 1990 and has been in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2007. The goals of the Union are as set forth below:

(a) The social and economic development of Sudanese women;

(b) The provision of support and encouragement for the participation of women and girls in academic and scientific education;

(c) The improvement of the environment and women's general health;

(d) The political empowerment of Sudanese women.

In the economic sphere, the Union has concentrated on improving the living conditions of families and, in particular, of rural women. The Union has undertaken a number of economic initiatives designed to combat poverty and alleviate its impact on women. In that regard, the Union has formulated a strategy based on women's economic issues and problems that has resulted in programmes and initiatives which aim to improve domestic living conditions and remove families from the cycle of poverty by means of projects that generate income. Emphasis is placed on rural women, under the slogan "Towards a pioneering role for rural women", and, as part of the promotion of the leadership of rural women, a rural women's innovation prize is presented to women who are outstanding in the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, food production, handicrafts, solidarity and services. That prize is generously sponsored by Ms. Fatima Khalid, and is awarded to women who carry out productive projects in remote rural areas of the Sudan. Competitors are judged by a central panel. The Union also seeks to use credit unions; it signs financing agreements with banks and has established savings accounts and revolving funds. It is interested in women who work in the various types of non-governmental sectors, and has played a significant part in motivating, developing, promoting and organizing economically active women with the help of funding institutions, which provide funding in the form of soft loans, and by establishing projects that help to alleviate poverty. One such project is the "women's purse", which provides favourable loans and microcredit in all women-related fields. Other projects involve the provision of furniture, the improvement of shelter, revolving funds for the development of rural women and the improvement of the situation of women who sell food, and a project for the funding of seasonal needs, including the needs of schoolchildren and needs arising during religious festivals. Assistance may be in cash or in kind, or in the form of soft loans. Such projects have been implemented in 10 States through the Agricultural Bank of Sudan and the Savings and Social Development Bank. An agreement has recently been reached with the latter to extend the "women's purse" into the States where it had not previously been available. The Union has also signed an agreement with the Zakat Chamber for the funding of a project to provide soft loans for impoverished rural women. Such loans will be in cash or in kind, and will fund projects that generate family income, without the need to obtain funding from banks or provide security: the funding is considered to be a gift or money that is invested with no interest. The Union follows up the use of the grant in order to ensure sustainability. That project has been carried out in 10 States. The Union also has a microcredit project in seven States that involves simple procedures and requires only good faith as security.

Projects that have been funded include such simple commercial operations as the sale of seasonal goods, second-hand clothing and foodstuffs; the manufacture and sale of Sudanese perfumes; and simple commercial and service projects, including the sale of poultry, seedlings and bread. In addition, the Union has been involved in projects that have been carried out through a Union branch of the Family Bank. All of those projects are aimed at increasing the productivity of women and providing support for vulnerable sectors of society; spreading a spirit of solidarity among women; developing small operations into profitable enterprises for rural women and, in particular, women heads of households; providing women with security, stability and protection; developing women's awareness of savings; spreading a culture of microfunding in society and in the target groups; developing the role of rural women in economic and social development; and encouraging women to break out of their traditional roles in production.

With regard to health, the Union, through women's development centres in all States of the Sudan, and in partnership with the federal Ministry of Health, the States ministries of health and health-related organizations, has endeavoured to train health staff in the area of mother and child health. The Union has ensured that at each such centre a health unit provides mother and child health services. The Union has also set up mobile clinics that serve remote rural areas and, with a view to reducing maternal and infant mortality rates, trains midwives under the project "A fully trained midwife for every village", whereby a young woman from each village is chosen and trained for work in her own village. Furthermore, traditional birth attendants have been trained to work in accordance with modern standards.

In the field of education, the Union has conducted campaigns to raise parents' awareness of the importance of girls' education and has worked with the Ministry of Education to ensure that nomadic women and children have access to educational services. The Union has set up kindergartens to provide preschool service in rural women's development centres, with a view to facilitating registration by mothers in various literacy programmes, vocational training courses and skills improvement training programmes, with the aim of generating income.

With a view to the development and well-being of rural women in the Sudan, the Sudanese Women General Union has worked for the advancement of women since it was established, employing all means to empower women, including partnerships with Government ministries and the various United Nations agencies that operate in the Sudan.

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## Statement submitted by African Action on AIDS, Associated Country Women of the World, European Union of Women, Hadassah: Women's Zionist Organization of America, International Alliance of Women, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, International Council of Women, International Federation for Home Economics, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Federation of University Women, National Council of German Women's Organizations, Servas International, Socialist International Women, Soroptimist International, Salvation Army, Women's Federation for World Peace International and Women's International Zionist Organization, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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## Statement

We the undersigned international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, members of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Status of Women, present for information and consideration by participants of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women the following statement on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication in development and current challenges.

Referring to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the only international human rights instrument with a specific article dedicated to the situation of rural women (article 14),

Referring to the Beijing Platform for Action, which highlights the need for policies and strategies designed to improve the situation of rural women producers, increase their incomes and provide household food security,

Considering key global development frameworks, such as Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Outcome of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals,

Considering that rural women account for over 80 per cent of the food production in most developing countries, particularly in Africa, but own only 1 per cent of the property, as rural women's property rights are limited by social norms, customs and legislation,

Recognizing the key role of women as preservers of both agrobiodiversity and agricultural knowledge, as well as women farmers' practices,

Considering that improved access of women to education and training contributes to improved food production and food hygiene in the household, thus achieving food security,

Referring to climate change and desertification, in particular in developing countries and the interdependence between vegetation, water and rainfall, in relation to the agricultural use of land,

Deploring "land grabbing" by some countries and companies for the purpose of agricultural production, which excludes the local farmers and leads to speculation by hedge funds and large global companies,

The undersigned NGOs,

- Emphasize the importance of ensuring for rural girls and women access to education and the need to support structures for basic education, secondary education and university education, as well as further education and vocational training, including part-time study, to allow women and girls to cope with agricultural and domestic responsibilities;
- Urge that rural women be trained in appropriate rural technologies so as to increase their knowledge of sustainable agricultural production methods, including improved irrigation, seed production and agroecological methods of farming;

- Call on Governments to implement legislation concerning women's rights to buy, inherit and own land by secure land titles, as well as equal treatment for female farmers in land reform;
- Stress the importance of securing women's access to agricultural extension technology services, marketing facilities and credit schemes;
- Stress the necessity of securing for women unrestricted access to microfinance schemes;
- Call for the provision of measures for financial aid and services enabling women to set themselves up in agricultural enterprises, as well as of measures to shorten the supply chain;
- Recommend decent and productive employment and income-generating opportunities for rural women, as well as programmes to strengthen women's participation and leadership in rural institutions, such as agricultural producers' and rural workers' associations, cooperatives, rural credit unions, water users' groups and self-help groups;
- Call on Governments and regional bodies, international organizations and private initiatives to establish rules guaranteeing the participation of rural women in decision-making for climate change adaptation and mitigation measures and programmes;
- Stress the importance of liberalizing rules and regulations governing trade in agricultural goods, lifting bans on agricultural imports from developing countries, reducing agricultural subsidies in industrialized countries that invariably culminate in the export of surplus agricultural products to developing countries and ensuring that women farmers receive fair financial compensation for their work and products;
- Request respect for internationally accepted agreements between Governments and the indigenous population in order to prevent the detrimental effects of "land grabbing".

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## Statement submitted by International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women and Women's Environment and Development Organization, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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## Statement

### Introduction

Urgent action is needed to mainstream gender equality and rural women's empowerment into climate change policies and programmes. No action would be more strategic to accelerate action on and ensure the effective implementation of those policies and programmes. Among the international instruments that can play a powerful role in this endeavour is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Although article 14 is specifically about rural women, all articles are relevant. The provisions of this convention related to gender equality and climate change are presented here.

Ratified by 187 countries (2011), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is often described as an international bill of rights for women. The Convention protects women from discrimination and all forms of political, social, cultural and economic inequality based on gender. It is the only human rights treaty that affirms the reproductive rights of women.

In a statement issued at its forty-fourth session the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted that gender equality is essential to the successful implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate change policies. Therefore, women's human rights should be included as an overarching guiding principle in the climate change treaty. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women affects the legal interpretation of treaty articles and it provides a moral compass for their practical application. It is also an important tool to plan for gender and women's empowerment in the Rio+20 process.

### Article 2

Women's invisibility in national statistics constitutes a violation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as lack of information affects a Government's ability to prevent discrimination. Examples are found in sectors such as forestry, energy, transport, construction and infrastructure, which typically do not collect gender-disaggregated data. Yet preliminary research indicates that when gender-blind policies in these sectors persist, women's contributions are undervalued and technological innovations fail to reach women.

Financial mechanisms associated with climate change, such as the Adaptation Fund, the Clean Development Mechanism, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) and the future Green Climate Fund, should be monitored and gender should be mainstreamed into their policies. This would comply with article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which obliges States Parties to embody the principle of the equality of men and women to ensure that public authorities and institutions, organizations or enterprises take action to remedy discrimination against women.

The Convention further addresses root causes. As discrimination is embedded in wider social inequalities, States Parties must take necessary steps to combat prejudices and customary practices based on stereotyped roles. One stereotype that is typically projected among scientists is that rural and indigenous women do not offer scientific knowledge, even though in many communities they often maintain

and promote biodiversity and are experts in medicinal plants. Other traditional knowledge can include management of forests, water conservation and food storage.

**Articles 7 and 8**

States Parties must ensure women have equal decision-making power at all levels, including in international processes such as the climate change treaty negotiations (arts. 7 and 8). However, only 14 per cent of heads of delegation at the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Cancun (2010) were women. There is reason to be concerned, as women are poorly represented in bodies that will implement the treaty at the national and the local levels, notably technical advisory bodies, parliaments/congresses, business councils and courts.

One hopeful sign is that several of the national adaptation programmes for action reference gender. In these plans, it is important to emphasize women's right to equal decision-making in public life, including the design of national adaptation programmes for action and medium-to-long-term national adaptation plans. Policymakers have yet to tap the potential of international women's movements. The "win-win" scenario is one that creates synergy between women's empowerment and mitigation and adaptation policies.

**Article 14**

Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women further strengthens provisions for rural women, including pastoralists, nomads, and hunters and gatherers, in diverse occupations (e.g., fishing, wage labour and Swidden agriculture). Recognizing the diversity of rural women is critical in rural communities experiencing food insecurity and environmental devastation. Of particular concern is the feminization of agriculture and the rise in numbers of older women and female heads of households due to the out-migration of men. In many communities, women must add work in fields and animal husbandry to existing responsibilities for cooking and for gathering wood and water.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations *State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011: women in agriculture; closing the gender gap* states that because women in rural areas have less access to productive resources and opportunities than men, there is a productivity gap, causing women farmers to produce less than men farmers. If the gender gap closes between women and men, productivity yields will increase on the women's farms by 20-30 per cent, potentially reducing the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17 per cent.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women notes that rural women should be empowered to manage the environment through equal access to productive resources. Article 14 guarantees rural women equal access to water and sanitation, agricultural credit and loans, and appropriate technology. One strategic use of credit would be to use clean-energy-burning stoves. However, this must happen rapidly and on a massive scale because black carbon produced by biofuel stoves is not only detrimental to women's health, but also a main contributor to global warming. If poor women are to change cooking technologies, they must be given better access to financing options, such as microcredit, rental and collective schemes.

Safety nets and insurance for social protection are considered essential to national adaptation plans as part of poverty reduction strategies (report by Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007) and improving the ability of women to cope with ecological stresses strengthens the entire family's adaptive resilience. However, rural and indigenous women rarely have access to adequate health-care facilities and social security. And while the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women recognizes that rural women have the right to adequate standards of living, housing and communication, these are seldom considered in climate change discussions.

**Articles 11.1, 13 and 15.1**

The climate change crisis potentially opens new financing, business and employment opportunities for women living in cities as well as in the countryside. The climate change treaty will set new directions for carbon trading markets and businesses for green technologies. In developing countries, renewable energy technologies promise to create more income-generating projects, such as making lamps and repairing devices using solar voltaic cells.

Diversification of income sources can help cushion the negative impact of climate change on agricultural livelihoods. The question is: will rural women benefit equally from these entrepreneurial opportunities? Articles 11.1, 13 and 15.1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women hold States Parties responsible for guaranteeing that women will have equal economic and employment rights. Governments should also promote childcare facilities to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities.

Article 15.1 affords women the same legal capacity as men to conclude contracts and administer property and mortgages, and in all other areas of economic life. Women employed in sectors that are traditionally male-biased must be afforded equal remuneration, including benefits, and granted equal treatment in the value of their work. They also need to be better represented in management and social audits of wage employment schemes.

**Article 12.1**

Women's rights to health are found in article 12 of the Convention and in General Recommendation 24 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which recognize the importance of gender equality to the quality of family life and the need for Governments to improve health statistics, as well as to allocate adequate resources for women's health care throughout their life cycle. The Committee has noted that women's health status and ability to access health services, including family planning, are intricately linked to gender-specific roles.

Some research indicates that women are disproportionally affected by natural disasters such as drought, floods and heat waves. For example, according to the World Health Organization, adverse reproductive outcomes follow disasters, including early pregnancy loss, premature delivery, stillbirths, delivery-related complications and infertility. In a 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh, many women perished with their children at home as they had to wait for their husbands to return and make an evacuation decision (Lorena Aguilar, "Is there a connection between gender and climate change?").

Climate change will further burden poor women through increases in malnutrition, floods, storms and fires, increased diarrhoeal disease and changes in the distribution of some infectious disease vectors. The whole family suffers if women die or cannot carry out caregiving roles.

**Article 10**

Rural women's access, use and control over science and technology, including formal and informal education and training, are vital to a community's ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Gender equality in education is guaranteed by article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which identifies the need for women's equal access to technical and professional education. The Convention also identifies the need for equal remuneration for women and social services to enable them to combine family responsibilities with work.

Article 10 reiterates that educational information to help improve the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning, is a woman's right.